

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Conversations with the Risen Jesus"
Dr. J. Dent

May 1, 2011
Second Sunday of Easter

It was a week and a weekend with almost too much to take in. Something like this weekend and week, with the Royal Wedding on Friday, with the federal election tomorrow, to Toronto and back on Monday and Tuesday with the Bible Society, the Holocaust service today at 2, the flipper dinner on Wednesday, salmon in puff pastry at Good Companions on Thursday, what a week! On top of that, did you know the King James Bible will be read in its entirety in 400 seconds simultaneously to honour the 400th Anniversary of its translation in 1611? Cf. <http://youversion.com/kjv400>

Of course when I say "it was quite a week," I am referring to the week and weekend of the first Easter, all the hopes and dreams of the followers of Jesus had gone up in smoke. The hopes and dreams of so many were burned on the day he was tortured to death. Burned by some of those closest to him, like Judas who betrayed him, and Peter, who denied him. Everything that had been placed in Jesus' hands seemed to evaporate on that first Good Friday.

But then the shock of the third day was the greatest surprise in all history. Proper historians of the day would never have recorded that it was only the women who got the message first, because that in itself would have discounted the veracity and historicity of what actually happened. But the Gospel writers wrote what happened and Jesus chose to talk to the women first. Was it because he knew they would be most receptive? Was it because they were with him, at least some of them, at the cross? We don't know all the reasons why. But they got the good news first.

They were asking. Everyone was asking: Could it be? Could Jesus actually beat death and open up a new life gate? Could it be that Jesus would become the firstborn from the dead, leading all who trust in him to life beyond this life? Could sane people believe this?

And yet they were experiencing it first hand, and not just one or two, who could be dismissed as having delusions, but over 500 witnesses, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: 6. John gives us more intimate accounts. He gives us the evening news from Easter Sunday, then a week later, on the Second

Sunday of Easter, which is today. He continues his account, moving from Mary Magdalene announcing she has seen the Lord to an unidentified room somewhere in the city, we find the disciples of Jesus together, at least the ten apostles, the 12 minus Judas and minus Thomas, but including many other disciples.

Then Jesus transports into the room even though it is locked. Now I say, "transports," whereas the text says, "came and stood among them (without using the door)." We know that Jesus has a physical body, because he lets people see him and touch him. We don't know exactly what the wounds which he had experienced from his torture looked like. The piercings in his hands and in his side were likely scars that were healed, but we don't know.

We also don't know the overall exact look of the body, particularly the face, because Mary who heard him and saw him first did not recognize him at first (cf John 20:14). So we conjecture that there is some disconnection between what we look like in this life and what we look like in the next. However, there is also enough connection between what we look like in this life and what we look like in the next that we will be able to recognize one another. Mary recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name.

He calls each of us by name as well. The question is whether we recognize Jesus to be God the Son who brings life. He is still calling us as he was speaking to his own friends the night of his resurrection and the week after.

I believe there is a discontinuity between our present bodies and the resurrection bodies which we all will have, all who trust Jesus, because there will be a change in physics. Just as angels and the Lord himself could go through walls and locked doors, so we will be able to transport ourselves in a manner different than our current capabilities. But even though he can go through our suspicion and our disbelief and our mistrust, he chooses to make his case to us, as he did to his disciples long ago. He brings peace to those who welcome him. "Peace be with you." *Shalom* Then John records Jesus breathing on them as a prophetic act of their receiving the Holy Spirit and he commissions them to tell this story of good news, to bring others to follow Jesus, and that there is real power in telling this story. Knowing and trusting Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins has been placed in the Church's hands. Although God could simply make everyone see all at once in a world wide TV broadcast, he chooses to use you and me. And when you and I explain the story to someone and they receive it, their sins are forgiven. And when

someone hears the story and says "I don't believe it," then their sins are not forgiven. There is real power in our explaining and sharing the good news about Jesus Christ. It matters if you do so.

Thomas is a case in point. His honesty puts him in that unforgiven category. He says he won't believe unless he can feel the places where Jesus was pierced. And we know he gets a chance to actually touch the Lord Jesus Christ.

I love Thomas because he is honest. He speaks up. He did so earlier in the upper room and he is doing it again. We don't know why he wasn't with the others the first time Jesus appeared to them. But we do know Jesus comes to see him and he is re-instated in his relationship with the Lord. He honestly brings his doubts before God. We are invited to do this as well. Then as God answers him, he moves to worship the Lord. Notice he changes from his stubbornness to worship Jesus. This is such a crucial passage for the divinity of Christ. There is no other honest way to interpret this passage except that Jesus is God. Thomas addresses him in verse 28, he says, "my Lord and my God." This not only speaks to the divinity of Jesus Christ, it also speaks of Thomas' personal commitment to Jesus.

But then Jesus speaks to each one of us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." It's a resurrection beatitude, encouraging all of us who have not had the experience Thomas had, yet carry the doubts or concerns that Thomas did, to worship Jesus as he did. Then the apostle speaks to each one of us in the narrator's voice. He says, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30)

Now is the time to say "yes" to Jesus. Now is the time to follow him with your whole heart, wherever you go, the polling stations, your place of work, where you find your recreation, in your homes, in your reflections, your head space and your heart space.

As we say "yes" again to Jesus, we experience anew the power of the resurrection life and the wisdom to live that life. Of course we need to continually be reading Scripture, praying, worshipping with music and with

our attitudes. All of us are on the journey, let us once again commit ourselves to the risen One who is with us.

Let us pray.